



**U.S. Department of Justice**

*United States Attorney  
District of Maryland*

Rod J. Rosenstein  
United States Attorney

Vickie E. LeDuc  
Public Information Officer

36 South Charles Street  
Fourth Floor  
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

410-209-4800  
TTY/TDD: 410-962-4462  
410-209-4885  
FAX 410-962-3091  
Vickie.LeDuc@usdoj.gov

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**Contact AUSA VICKIE E. LEDUC or  
MARCIA MURPHY at 410-209-4885**

**SOLOTHAL THOMAS AND EDWARD COUNTESS CONVICTED IN  
MURDER-FOR-HIRE SCHEME**

*Defendants Face Mandatory Life Sentences*

BALTIMORE, Maryland - Solothal Thomas, a/k/a "Itchy Man," age 30, and Edward Countess, a/k/a "Bam," age 30, both of Baltimore were convicted on five counts relating to their participation in a 2001 murder-for-hire in Baltimore County, announced United States Attorney for the District of Maryland Rod J. Rosenstein.

United States Attorney Rod J. Rosenstein stated, "Solothal Thomas and Edward Countess join a growing list of armed criminals who have been exiled to federal prison for the rest of their lives. In the federal system, a life sentence means life in a federal prison far from home, with no probation and no parole. They will never again carry a gun or shoot another victim on the streets of Baltimore. This case demonstrates the commitment of federal and state law enforcement to deliver on the message that gun crime brings serious jail time."

Evidence at the trial, which began on June 12, 2006, established that on October 2, 2001, Solothal Thomas and Edward Countess shot and killed Jesse Williams, then age 33, in the 8200 block of Courtland Manor Road in Baltimore County. Testimony at trial proved that Thomas and Countess ambushed Williams as he got into his car to go to work and shot him 15 times. Trial testimony proved that the murder was a contract murder ordered by drug dealer Tyree Stewart in retaliation for a 1999 robbery. Thomas, Countess and three other men were paid a total of \$10,000 for their roles in planning and carrying out the murder.

Thomas and Countess were convicted of murder-for-hire; conspiracy to commit a murder-for-hire; conspiracy to possess, and possession of, a firearm in furtherance of a drug crime or violent crime resulting in death. Countess was also convicted of conspiracy to distribute marijuana.

Thomas and Countess claimed that they were not subject to the jurisdiction of the federal courts. The defendants were removed from the courtroom after refusing to participate in the proceedings, and the trial continued without them.

Thomas and Countess face a mandatory sentence of life in prison and a \$250,000 fine for the murder-for-hire and murder-for-hire conspiracy charges and a mandatory sentence of life in prison and a \$250,000 fine for the charge of possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug crime or violent crime resulting in death. Countess also faces a maximum sentence of life in prison and a \$4 million fine for conspiracy to distribute marijuana. U.S. District Judge Catherine C. Blake has scheduled sentencing for Thomas and Countess on October 27, 2006 at 9:15 a.m. and 2:00 p.m., respectively. The defendants remain detained.

Danta Thomas, age 35, and Linwood Smith, age 42, both of Baltimore, were also charged in this case and previously pleaded guilty to charges relating to their participation in the murder. They each face a maximum sentence of life in prison and a fine of \$250,000. Tyree Stewart, age 32, of Joppa, Maryland and Corey Smith, age 29, of Baltimore both pleaded guilty in a separate case to engaging in a continuing criminal enterprise and as part of their pleas admitted to having ordered a contract killing on behalf of their drug organization. Stewart and Smith face a maximum sentence of life in prison. Their sentencings have not been scheduled.

United States Attorney Rod J. Rosenstein praised the investigative work performed by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; the Baltimore City Police Department; the Baltimore County Police Department; and the United States Attorney's Office. The U.S. Marshals Service also assisted in the apprehension of Solothal Thomas. Mr. Rosenstein also thanked Assistant U.S. Attorneys Jason M. Weinstein and Andrea L. Smith, who are prosecuting the case.